

**Family Systems Theory**  
**MFT 763, Section 001, Fall 2007**  
Department of Marriage and Family Therapy

Professor:	Stephen T. Fife, Ph.D.	Class Time:	Tuesday 1:00-3:45pm
Office:	MPE 115	Room:	MPE 233
Phone:	895-3117	Office Hours:	Mon. 12 & 4pm; Tue. 10-11am;
Email:	stephen.fife@unlv.edu		Wed. 10am-12pm

**Required Texts:**

Becvar, D. S., & Becvar R. J (1999). *Systems theory and family therapy: A primer*. Lanham, MD: University Press.

The Arbinger Institute, Inc., (2000). *Leadership and self-deception: Getting out of the box*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

**Required Readings:**

Slife, B. D., & Williams, R. N. (1995). *What's Behind the Research? Discovering Hidden Assumptions in the Behavioral Sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Chapter 1 & 2 (Available in the UNLV bookstore)

Additional Required Readings are posted on WebCampus.

**Course Description:**

In-depth analysis of general systems theory as it applies to counseling, especially with multi-person client systems such as couples and families. Major concepts, philosophical foundations, and pragmatic implications of using systemic principles in counseling will be discussed.

**Course Objectives and Student Learning Outcomes (SLO):**

Students who successfully complete this course will:

1. Define concepts and principles of family systems theory and their clinical application.
2. Understand historical and contemporary developments pertaining to family systems theories.
3. Utilize critical thinking principles in the evaluation of family systems theory and critiques to it.
4. View marital and family issues and therapeutic processes systemically.

**Method of Instruction:**

Classroom instruction will include a combination of lecture, group discussions, and clinical role plays.

**General Requirements & Policies:**

Students are expected to:

1. Attend class consistently and punctually. If you know you are going to be absent, please inform me at your earliest opportunity. You are responsible for obtaining all material when you miss a class. Missing class time will have a negative effect on your learning and likely your grade.
2. Complete assigned readings prior to the date of discussion in class and be prepared to participate respectfully in class discussions with questions and comments from the readings, the information presented in class, and your own ideas.
3. Complete assignments by the beginning of class on the date they are due. All assignments must be typed in 12-point font with 1-inch margins. Please staple papers in upper left corner. No folders, binders, etc. please.
4. At the graduate level, learning is primarily student-generated and is supplemented by course instruction. Therefore, the responsibility rests upon the student to master the material.

5. My responsibility as the instructor includes thorough preparation and presentation of concepts and skills that will help you succeed in your work with individuals, couples, and families. I am also responsible for managing the classroom and maintaining a learning environment.

### **Graded Assignments:**

#### **Assignments (In-class and Out-of-class)** (8-12 assignments; 10 points each)

Students will be required to attend class, participate in class discussions, in-class assignments/activities (including group presentations), and role-plays. It is also expected that students will be respectful of their classmates' learning. A primary goal of this course is for you to critically evaluate issues relating to family systems theory and to consider their implications for you. Therefore, many class periods will include your participation through various in-class activities, which will be graded (10 points each). There will also be a few assignments which require your work outside of the class (10 points each).

Measurement Procedure: Students will be evaluated on their participation/ successful completion of the assignment.

This fulfills SLO 1-4 and department educational outcomes (DEO) 3, 4, 6, 7, 9.

#### **Class Presentation & Handout** (50 points)

Students will form groups of two and prepare a class presentation on a specific topic related to the CHOICE concepts of family systems theory. This is an opportunity for a more in-depth study of a specific topic and a chance to be creative in teaching your fellow classmates. In the presentation, students are responsible for *leading class discussions*. The presentation/discussion should take about **1 to 1 ½ hours** of class, and should consist of mixed *lecture, discussion questions, group activities, presentations*, or whatever you think will help the class best learn and apply the material. It should be *interactive* as well as informative. Presenters should create a **handout** to distribute to class members that includes important summary points on the topic and references to direct us to additional resources.

Measurement Procedure: Students will be evaluated on the degree to which they complete the above criteria and present in a professional manner.

This fulfills SLO 1-4 and department educational outcomes (DEO) 3, 4, 6, 7, 9.

#### **Film Analysis/Systems Theory Application Paper** (50 points)

The film analysis/systems theory application paper is a large-scale assignment in which students will evaluate a family in a film using concepts from family systems theory and alternatives to family systems theory. The paper should be 8-10 pages (typed, double-spaced) and is to be written for a professional audience using APA style. Within the paper, you must consult at least *five* sources in addition to your textbook. All sources should be referenced in the paper and included in a reference section. Additional information on the assignment and grading criteria will be presented on WebCampus.

Measurement Procedure: Students will be evaluated on the degree to which they demonstrate an understanding of family systems theory and its alternatives through the analysis of a film and write in a professional manner.

This fulfills SLO 1-4 and department educational outcomes (DEO) 3, 4, 6, 7, 9.

#### **Final Exam** (100 points)

The exam is intended to help facilitate your mastery of the material and help you prepare for the state/national licensing exams and professional practice. The final exam will be comprehensive and will consist of short answer and essay questions. Be prepared!

Measurement Procedure: Students will be evaluated on the degree to which they demonstrate understanding of the ideas presented in the *assigned readings* and in *class discussions*.

This fulfills SLO 1-4 and department educational outcomes (DEO) 3, 4, 6, 7, 9.

### **Policy for late assignments & unexcused absences:**

Assignments must be turned in at the beginning of class on the day they are due. Late assignments will be penalized 10% of the grade earned per day late. Unexcused absences on exam days and in-class assignments cannot be made up and will result in a score of zero (0) for the exam or assignment. Students must provide documented evidence of an approved excused absence.

### **Grading:**

Students will be graded according to their performance on exams, assignments, and class participation. Grades will be calculated by a percentage of points earned in relation to the total points possible in the course. Grades will be based on the following percentages (+ and – grades will be given):

93 – 100 = A	73 – 76 = C	Assignments	80-120 points
90 – 92 = A-	70 – 72 = C-	Group Presentation	50 points
87 – 89 = B+	67 – 69 = D+	Film Analysis Paper	50 points
83 – 86 = B	63 – 66 = D	Final Exam	100 points
80 – 82 = B-	60 – 62 = D-	<b>Total:</b>	<b>280-320 points</b>
77 – 79 = C+	Below 60 = F		

### **Additional Policies:**

**Disability Statement:** The UNLV Disability Resource Center (DRC) houses the resources for students with disabilities. If you have a documented disability that may require accommodations, you will need to contact the DRC for the coordination of services. The DRC is located in the Student Services Complex (SSC), Room 137. Their numbers are: (702) 895-0866/VOICE; (702) 895-0652/TDD; and (702) 895-0651/Fax. For additional information please visit [www.unlv.edu/studentlife/drc](http://www.unlv.edu/studentlife/drc).

**Religious Holidays:** As indicated by UNLV policy, any student missing classes or other assigned work due to religious holiday observance shall have the opportunity to make up that work during the term. It is the student's responsibility to notify the instructor at least **2 weeks prior** to any observed holiday.

**Academic Integrity:** All members of the UNLV community share a responsibility to uphold the fundamental values of honesty, trust, respect, fairness, responsibility, and professionalism. By choosing to join the UNLV community, students accept the expectations of the Academic Misconduct Policy as outlined in the student catalog. **Students who violate standards of academic integrity will be given a failing grade for the class.** UNLV requires all members of the University Community to familiarize themselves with and to follow copyright and fair use requirements. You are individually and solely responsible for violations of copyright and fair use laws. The University will neither protect nor defend you nor assume any responsibility for employee or student violations of fair use laws. Violations of copyright laws could subject you to federal and state civil penalties and criminal liability, as well as disciplinary action under University policies. Copyright and fair use policies can be found at: <http://www.unlv.edu/committees/copyright>

**Cell Phones & Pagers:** Please turn off cell phones and pagers during class, unless you have made arrangements with the instructor prior to the class period.

**Personal Criteria:** As a counselor in training, you are constantly being evaluated for your fitness for this profession in every class. This evaluation is subjective and based on your class participation, evaluation of other assignments, interpersonal interactions with other students and clients, if appropriate, etc. Students who do not meet the following criteria may have their grade reduced in the course, be administratively dropped or “red flagged” for a discussion by the faculty as a whole. The following criteria are used in this

evaluation: 1) being empathic; 2) being genuine; 3) being accepting; 4) being open minded and non-dogmatic; 5) being self-reflective and having an internal locus of control; 6) being mentally healthy; 7) being capable of building alliances; 8) being competent in knowledge and skills. (Neukrug, E. (1999). *The world of the counselor*. Pacific Grove, CA.: Brook/Cole.)

**Ethical Behavior:** Students will abide by the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) Code of Ethics. It is your responsibility to be familiar with the guidelines. Ethical violations are serious and may lead to disciplinary action, which could lead to separation from the counseling program.

**Tentative Class Calendar:**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Class Topic</b>	<b>Readings &amp; Assignments</b>
8/28	Introduction & Course Overview (CHOICE)	
9/4	Critical Thinking & Studying Theory	Slife & Williams Ch. 1 & 2 (reading packet)
9/11	Critical Thinking & Studying Theory (cont.)	Slife & Williams & Patch Adams Assignments Due ( <i>Read assignment before watching movie</i> )
9/18	Systems Theory & History	Becvar Ch. 1 & 2
9/25	First Order Cybernetics	Becvar Ch. 3; Assigned Reading; <b>Presentation #1</b>
10/2	Second Order Cybernetics	Becvar Ch. 4 & 5; Assigned Reading
10/9	The Family as a System	Becvar Ch. 6 & 7; Assigned Reading; <b>Presentation #2</b>
10/16	Organization and Structure	Assigned Reading; <b>Presentation #3</b>
10/23	Information Processing & Change	Assigned Reading; <b>Presentation # 4 &amp; 5</b>
10/30	Ecosystemic Embeddedness	Assigned Reading; <b>Presentation #6</b>
11/6	Implications for Family Therapy: So What?	Becvar Ch. 9 & 10; Assigned Reading
11/13	Critiques of Systems Theory	Becvar Ch. 8; Assigned Reading
11/20	Self-deception and Family Systems Theory	<i>Leadership and Self-deception</i> Ch. 1-16
11/27	Self-deception and Family Systems Theory	<i>Leadership and Self-deception</i> Ch. 17-24
12/4	Self-deception and Family Systems Theory	Assigned Reading
<b>12/11</b>	<b>Final Exam: December 11 (Tuesday), Time: TBA</b>	

**Note:** This syllabus is prepared as a guideline for the course. It is *not* a contract between the professor and student, and the professor reserves the right to modify the syllabus as necessary (i.e., extend or limit discussion on a topic, add additional assignments or readings, subtract assignments or readings, etc.). Students will be notified promptly of any changes.